

Oral testimony relative to HB 5109

Jacqui Penda, CLC, Doula, Board Member of the Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition

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Dear Senator Fonfara, Representative Rojas, Senator Witkos, Representative Davis and distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee my name is Jacqui Penda. I am a Certified Lactation Counselor, Birth and Postpartum Doula, Board Member of the CBC, former pumping mom and milk donor. I thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 5109 an act to exempt breastfeeding equipment and supplies from the sales and use tax. A topic that is very near and dear to my heart.

My breastfeeding journey began when my oldest son Dylan, was born on August 8, 2013. Like many first-time mothers, I had researched the extensive benefits of breastmilk and knowing the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommends that babies receive nothing but breast milk during the first six months of life, I decided that I wanted to breastfeed my baby. After getting home from the hospital and 3 weeks of exclusively breastfeeding, *I was exhausted*. I began pumping so my husband could help with feedings and I could get some much-needed rest. From then on, I began "stock piling" milk preparing for my return to my full-time job. When I went back to work, I pumped three times a day and breastfed while at home. I did this for a full year. All the while, continuously purchasing storage bags, replacement tubing, valves, bottles and flanges.

On January 20, 2016 we welcomed our second son, Luke into the world. My goal again was to breastfeed and pump for my baby, especially after such a positive first-time breastfeeding experience. My oldest son was in daycare from 4 months old until he was 2.5. When your child is in a daycare setting, he is exposed to an endless number of germs at a very young age. During those years, Dylan was sick only a handful of times and the few times he was sick, I noticed the illness would be relatively mild and short lived. I strongly believe that his body's ability to fend off the litany of common childhood illnesses was because he exclusively received breastmilk for his first year of life. In fact, studies show babies who are not breastfed visit the physician more often, spend more days in the hospital, and require more prescriptions than breastfed infants.

With my second son, I was lucky enough to have an abundant milk supply. Before long, I had an entire freezer full of milk. During this time, I saw a story on Channel 8 about Mother's Milk Bank Northeast, which is an accredited, nonprofit community milk bank that provides donated, pasteurized human milk to NICU babies in fragile health throughout the Northeastern United States. They were opening the first ever milk depot in CT located in the Acelleron office in Guilford. After seeing that story, I decided to contact MMBNE, went through the necessary screening process and became a milk donor. I began bringing milk bi-weekly to the Acelleron office and after about 8 months, I had donated 2,453 ounces of "liquid gold". Donating my extra milk was deeply rewarding for me and sparked my passion for supporting mothers and

families here in CT. I could not have made this contribution without my breast pump and supplies.

I was able to obtain a basic pump through my health insurance for my first son and I remember thinking there weren't many fully covered options (I now realize that many of the breast pump providers are likely limited with what they could offer for options due to the low reimbursement environment in CT as well as the additional burden of paying the sales tax on a prescription item). After about 4 months or so, I ended up purchasing an upgraded pump out of pocket, as my fully covered pump was not sufficient in adequately removing milk. Additionally, my insurance did not cover any accessories or supplies that I needed in order to be successful at pumping. These included items such as breastmilk storage containers, breast shields, power adapter/battery pack, flanges, tubing, pump bag, bottle cooler bag, and a hands-free bra. All necessary items for a pumping mom going back to work. With my second son, I used my insurance coverage to subsidize an upgraded pump model I chose which I ended up using for my entire second time pumping.

The cost for pumping supplies quickly adds up and I was lucky enough to both breastfeed and pump. For various reasons, some women must exclusively pump for their baby, which greatly increases these monthly supply expenses. The removal of sales tax would lessen the financial burden on mothers and their families who are simply trying to provide the best nourishment for their babies.

I am forever grateful that I was able to provide nutritious, lifesaving, essential milk not only to my children but to countless other babies in desperate need. My success would not have been possible without all the equipment and accessories I purchased. Breastfeeding equipment and supplies are necessary items for a breastfeeding mother and like formula, diapers and feminine hygiene products, should also be exempt from the sales and use tax in support of all breastfeeding mothers in CT.

Thank you so much for your time and I hope you can support HB 5109.

Sincerely,

Jacqui Penda